

Limit situations, affects and resilience: psychoanalysis and M. Henry phenomenology

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Abstract

There are three central pedagogic goals, which are the focus of the present paper: first, to contribute to awareness raising, within the pedagogic framework that links sensitivity, to information, to training, to education, to change and to transformation; second, to acquire basic concepts related to phenomenological thinking that may help to ground psychoanalytic theory in sound academic frameworks; and third, to propose a deep-learning experience, at individual and personal level, through the reasoning of one of the most revolutionary of contemporary thinkers, Michel Henry. Terrorism distorts trust relationships. It constitutes a signal of deep suffering that has built up to a succession of destruction waves. Terrorism is global and local, and it affects all levels of society. Contemporary societies face severe threats, which challenge their most fundamental principles. Facing new situations, limit situations, which stretch to the limit the capacity to create opportunities for development and growth at individual and collective level, there is the need to rethink the basic values and baseline goals that may inaugurate a new era, an era not yet present but whose core characteristics may be drawn in loose traces. Such is the role of Michel Henry phenomenology, a phenomenology of affects, of life, of the body and of the manifestation of reality. That is, a material phenomenology that may create new frontiers and new horizons for thought and action. Henry's book "The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis" presents an inspiring interpretation that is crucial in present times. When facing violence, disruption and destruction, Henry's account of the philosophy of consciousness signifies an illuminating account of the resilient nature of human beings. Henry develops a powerful reading matrix for interpreting current reality, through an analysis of the evolution of Modernity. Descartes cogito is reinterpreted as auto-affectation, as "I fell", and as bridging representation and being, in a phenomenological encounter. Three ideas are central within this context: First, psychoanalysis is one of the most sophisticated and complex interpretations of human mental functioning, which have an impact both in mental health and in dealing with therapeutically effective techniques. Second, psychoanalysis has significant contributions to make in terms of philosophical anthropology, i.e. of how the human being may be understood and of how may psychoanalytic theory help real life individuals to promote the best possible conditions for collective successful growth and development. Third, psychoanalysis creates interfaces that work in several registers and all must be considered and be dealt with, optimising its potential for transformation and change. Such interfaces include: the patient-analyst dyad; the analyst-supervisor and the peers support; the psychoanalytic scientific community and its interface with other arts and sciences communities; the interfaces with political decision-making at sector and local level, and in global terms through the World Health Organisation. In the evolution of modern thought, there is a relevant influence from the Renaissance rediscovery of gnosis, hermeticism and maniqueism. This influence was later contradicted by the philosophers of the suspect of the XX century, Nietzsche, Freud and Marx. In the early decades of the XXI century, it is necessary to revisit the founding pillars of civilization and to question present day taken for granted assumptions, rethinking science, techno-science and knowledge. In this context, psychoanalytic thinking and practice has crucial contributions to make, which may help to guide policy-making and to direct professional action in the direction of greater authenticity, density and intensity of human life. That is, to enable and to create the conditions for the best possible human organisation to occur, and for the best of human potential to emerge and to flourish. Terrorism needs a re-inversion of negative energy: a catalyst synergy that promotes win-win situations and virtuous circles in a domino effect. Such is the promise of psychoanalytic theory and practice, to unleash human power, i.e., the best of what human beings have to offer.